

HONORABLE JAMES A. O'BRYAN, JR.

Post Office Box 600325, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands 00801

Good morning, Chairperson Carla J. Joseph, and other members of the 35th Legislature's Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection, other testifiers, and fellow Virgin Islanders:

My name is James A. O'Bryan, Jr. I am a three-term former State Chairperson of the Virgin Islands Democratic Party, a member of the 16th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, and a government service retiree of 42 years in the Executive and Legislative branches of the Virgin Islands, and one service in the House of Representatives of the United States. I am a Virgin Islander by birth, mindset, and choice.

I appear in support of Bill No. 35-0006, honoring and commending former Senator George E. Goodwin for his many years of expansive contributions to the Virgin Islands community as a whole, through his roles in various areas of service to the territory as well as an advocacy for social justice for underserved people in the Virgin Islands; to rename the Cricket Field located on Parcel H of Tract 1, Estate Nazareth, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands in his honor; and to award former Senator George E. Goodwin the Virgin Islands Medal of Honor, and for other related purposes.

There is irony in my testimony. I am the great-grandson of noted Virgin Islands educator Emanuel Benjamin Oliver. Oliver migrated to the Virgin Islands via his native Montserrat via Antigua, first, to St. Croix then settling on St. Thomas as a teacher of teaching at the Abraham Lincoln School.

Virgin Islands Historians indicate that E. Benjamin Oliver introduced the sport of Cricket into the Virgin Islands. My father and Police Captain Raymond Chesterfield, who was his cousin, were leading players in their day. I talk Dodger baseball, and George Godwin responded with his love for cricket.

While both of us are former senators, we did not serve in the Senate together. We both were members of the Alexander Farrelly Administration, he was GERS Administrator, and I was Press Secretary and Director of Public Relations. I was District and Communications Director for Delegate Donna M. Christensen in the first of her nine terms in the United States Congress. George was the Delegate's staff assistant addressing immigration issues. Former Senate President Shawn Michael Malone, who was also on staff, and I marveled at the scores of people who came regularly to the office seeking immigration assistance from George Goodwin

Goodwin was appointed Democratic Party Treasurer on the three occasions I was State Chairperson of the Virgin Islands Democratic Party. After Governor Charles Turnbull appointed me St. Thomas/Water Island Administrator, George Goodwin replaced me as Assistant to the Governor for Policy Initiatives.

I know George E. Goodwin as a trusted political ally, colleague, and friend. His contributions to the Virgin Islands, his dedication, and his service are immeasurable and most worthy of recognition by this august body. We speak of a confidant and advisor to governors, delegates, senators, Democratic Party leaders, and many of the significant political leaders of the last century and this generation.

Senator George Goodwin is the person who planted the idea with Governor Alexander Farrelly of the government opening discussions with the Danes for the purchase of the West Indian Company in 1991. We speak of the person who fought for dignity, acceptance, public education, and human rights for Caribbean and non-citizens migrating to the Virgin Islands. They are not glory days to be proud of in the Virgin Islands history. Then George Goodwin stood tall!

We speak of a person who advised and prepared immigration and naturalization documents for thousands of migrants during his lifetime of advocacy and leadership of the Alien Interest Movement. We speak of a man whom Virgin Islanders elected to the Virgin Islands Legislature.

Senator George E. Goodwin is a Virgin Islands human rights champion and giant! In 1968 Senator Robert Kennedy arrived in California to launch his presidential campaign by asking to meet Cesar Chavez, the legendary Mexican migrant worker's advocate. For his stalwart work on behalf of thousands of persons migrating to the Virgin Islands, George Goodwin is very much comparable to California's Cesar Chavez. The actions by this body to recognize his human rights advocacy, promotion of social reforms, and justice are very fitting and proper.

Madam Chair, I salute you for your work during the Turnbull Administration, as my colleague working alongside him. I salute your sponsorship of this measure of this Human Rights champion. By honoring George E. Goodwin you remind Virgin Islanders of the mandate of the closing stanza of the Virgin Islands Anthem:

“God bless our Virgin Islands, humbly now we pray,
Where all mankind can join today in friendly warmth of work and play. God
bless our Virgin Islands, Beautiful and tall. Beneath a sunny sky, Hilltops high
Hold out a welcome for one and all.”

Thank you for the opportunity to give voice to my view.

